



The MidAmerica Messenger

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As the new church year begins, we encourage you to get fully engaged with your congregation, nearby UU congregations, and the Region! There is so much to be gained when we work together!

We always appreciate your comments and suggestions for the newsletter. Feel free to send us a message (<mailto:midamerica@uua.org>)!

Sincerely,

Nancy Heege, Congregational Life Consultant

Spiritual Direction: An Essential Tool for Ministry in the 21st Century

by Rev. Phillip Lund, Congregational Life Consultant

Over the last few decades, the number of spiritual directors in the United States has steadily increased. Amy Frykholm writing in *The Christian Century* notes that "the dramatic growth of Spiritual Directors International (SDI) illustrates the trend: it had about 1,200 members in 1995 and about 6,000 by 2005, and it expects to have over 10,000 by 2016." At the same time, the number of people who identify as "spiritual but not religious" has increased as well, up to 33% of the population in the



United States according to one recent survey. And all this is happening as a growing number of religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S. (the "nones") say "they are not looking for a religion." While there certainly are a number of reasons for these trends, one distinct possibility is that more and more people in the United States are spurning traditional sources of spiritual guidance-ordained clergy in established churches-and turning to spiritual directors to accompany them on their search for truth and meaning. It appears that organized religion in America is no longer the go-to place for people to take their "real questions...about what matters most, unemployment, children, divorce, terminal illness, life and death stuff" (Gil Stafford, *When Leadership and Spiritual Direction Meet: Reflections and Stories for Congregational Life*.)

So what would it take for local congregations to once again be seen as the obvious first choice for people seeking spiritual guidance? One possibility would be for congregations to have an authentic focus on spiritual formation in all aspects of their ministry -- a focus that would inevitably require skilled ministerial leadership. But most ministers do not have the time or the money to be trained as spiritual directors in tradition programs, which generally take two years to complete and cost thousands of dollars. That's why we are offering the Clergy Seminar Series in Congregation-Based Spiritual Direction-a one year certificate program designed to teach ministers how to incorporate their pastoral care skills into short-term spiritual direction with individuals, gain experience in facilitating small group spiritual direction, and learn how the practice of individual and group spiritual direction can deepen the spiritual life of congregations and other religious organizations.

The Clergy Seminar Series meets for three times for three-day sessions over a nine month period, beginning in October. Sessions will be held in each of the following locations in the MidAmerica Region: Bloomington, Indiana; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Lawrence, Kansas. Ministers of UU congregations in MidAmerica can register at a special reduced rate of \$650. For more information, contact the Rev. Phillip Lund at plund@uua.org or 612-875-0959.

St. Louis Area UUs Respond in Support of the Community of Ferguson

MidAmerica Region Board President Bill Sasso visited recently with the UU clergy in the Saint Louis area.

Our St. Louis area UUs have responded to the shooting of Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri, with personal outreach, vigils, and other forms of constructive engagement. To share information about what has happened and is happening, they have created a Facebook page that you can access at <https://www.facebook.com/stlstandingonthesideoflove>. If you would like to know more about how we are responding, this Facebook page is an excellent place to start!



St. Louis area ministerial colleagues, volunteering at a community center in Ferguson.

*Back row: Rev. Michael Hennon, Rev. Thomas Perchlik (First U, St Louis MO), Rev. Julie Taylor, Bill Sasso (MA President)
Middle: Rev. Sarah Richards (Carbondale U Fellowship), Rev. Krista Taves (Emerson UU Chapel), Rev. Barbara Hoag Gadon (Eliot U Chapel)
Seated: Paul Oakley*

Gratitude for MidAmerica Region and Its Former Districts

by Kathy Burek & Amy Taylor

(Kathy Burek was President of Prairie Star District from July 1, 2010 to present. Amy Taylor was President of Heartland District from November 2010 to June 30, 2013. Both served on the Regional Transition Team and on the MidAmerica Board for the first year of the Region.)



It is time for us to move on to other things, but we want to say THANK YOU for so many things. Thank you for your trust and your willingness to live into the unknown and to carry a vision forward of what can be done together. Thank you for your honesty, your truthful responses and your shared wisdom as we worked on regionalization.

We have had the privilege of working with, to quote a consultant, "very high functioning Boards." We have known the joy of having the right talent, in the right place, at the right time and having these people unselfishly committed to the work of regionalization and continuing to run the Districts at the same time. Please continue to support and send people to Leadership School and provide leadership training for your youth and adult members. Volunteering for this faith is a gift given and for us has been an unexpected gift received.

We have had the privilege of working with a courageous staff that supported us, no matter what we explored, no matter how it pushed their comfort levels, entertaining possibilities of creating something beyond any previous visions, creating together.

We are officially no longer trustees on the MidAmerica Board but we feel confident that the current MA Board will vision things we couldn't see and work with staff and you to create a region of interconnected UUs in covenant with each other, changing the world. We are powerful individually but even greater together. Assuming goodwill, working in cooperation, tackling hard questions, we have done things as Districts and as a Region that others thought impossible. Let's live our vision:

The MidAmerica Region: Building a New Era in Unitarian Universalism where UUs:

- Visibly live our faith
- Create connections
- Grow our membership
- Welcome all persons who share our UU values

Welcomed, Safe, and Respected

by Nancy Combs-Morgan, Congregational Life Consultant

Every child, youth and adult seeks and deserves to be welcomed, safe, and respected in all of our congregations and at our Regional events. I seek to help this happen by coaching our congregations and Regional groups as they navigate through and help to maintain good process.



Keeping your "Safe Congregations Policy" up to date:

- Be sure to review your **behavioral guidelines** for your congregation, paid staff and volunteers on a yearly basis.
- **References** - are you asking your volunteers working with children, youth and at-risk adults for references?
- **Criminal Background checks** - these checks should be done yearly, the UUA recommends either Oxford Document Management Company (<https://www.oxforddoc.com>) or Church Mutual (<https://www.churchmutual.com/109/Background-Checks>).
- **Six Month Rule** - abide by this excellent provision that any adult seeking to volunteer and/or work with your children and youth should have been members for at least six months before they begin this important work.
- **Volunteer Application** - yes, this is a terrific method to get the important and relevant information for your volunteers.

Balancing Acts: Look here for Rev. Debra Haffner's important and consistently helpful guide on a wide spectrum of issues, including responsible staffing; how to be a sexually healthy faith community; and how to make sure that you are providing safe and secure environments of care. <https://www.uua.org/safe/youth> For more information check out our "Becoming a Safe Congregation (<https://www.uua.org/leaderlab/safe-congregations-where-begin>)" archived webinar.

MidAmerica Facebook Page

If you're on Facebook, please look for our "MidAmerica UUA" Facebook page and "like" it. It's a great way to find out what other congregations are doing and get some terrific ideas for YOUR congregation! <https://www.facebook.com/MidAmericaUUA>



The New in the New Era - Workshop Applications Open!

This year, our Regional Assembly will be in one location - Naperville, Illinois - on the weekend of April 17-19th. Our theme is "The New in the New Era of Unitarian Universalism," and on Saturday April 18th, we will be exploring this in workshops that we hope you will provide!

What have you learned, or what is your congregation doing differently? How are you reaching out across the boundaries of your congregation, and how are you working with partners? How do you understand how we can work well in the 21st century? These are all the questions we hope you'll think about as you consider offering a workshop at our meeting.

Learn more about RA 2015 (<https://www.uua.org/midamerica/ra/ra-archives/2015>).

Please feel free to be in touch with Lisa Presley if you have other questions, lpresley@uua.org.

Friends of MidAmerica Region

MidAmerica Region is now just over a year old. Our staff is working hard to refine the new systems for communication, for our work with ministerial transitions, for consultation and support for church staff and lay leaders. Staff members are crisscrossing the region, getting to know and be known across our old district borders. Our administrative staff is working well together as a team.

While the majority of costs for the services we offer to congregations in the MidAmerica Region are covered by the Fair Share contributions of congregations, those contributions don't cover it all. For that reason, we have a Friends of the MidAmerica Region program. Later this fall, we will be inviting you to make a financial gift to the MidAmerica Region to contribute to the good work being done in the region. Donations can be made online or by sending a check. Watch your email for the opportunity, and consider making a generous gift.

Resource for Congregations



The UU Association of Membership Professionals has available book discussion groups as well as webinars. <http://www.uuamp.org/resources/continuing-education-offerings>

Thanks for Your Responses!

Thanks to those Congregation Presidents, Parish Ministers, and Religious Educators who responded to our invitation in July to fill out a survey about the services we offer to congregations. We'll be doing the survey again in the spring, so if you're a Congregation President, Parish Minister, or Religious Educator in one of our congregations, watch for your opportunity to connect with us in this way.

Central Midwest, Heartland, and Prairie Star Districts of the Unitarian Universalist Association joining together to create a new era in Unitarian Universalism as MidAmerica Region.
